

My question is: Can they really be serious? Can they really be serious that they are still searching for some unifying position? It appears that they have no unifying position, and they have no plan to lead the victory in Iraq, or to lead the American people during one of the toughest fights that our Nation has ever endured.

It is indeed a time of testing for our Nation, and we must pass the test, not just for the safety and security of the Iraqi people, but for our own safety and security, and for the safety and security of our children and our children's children.

So far, it appears that the only thing the critics can agree on is their willingness to criticize the efforts in the global war on terror, to harp on those things in a way that is not productive and certainly not helpful. And it has the consequence, unintended or not, of undermining public support and confidence for our efforts in Iraq and in the global war on terror.

So it makes me wonder—and I am sure the American people must be wondering—are they more interested in the upcoming elections not in Iraq, but in America in November, or are they more interested in winning the global war on terror without regard to politics or elections?

It is important that we put the situation in Iraq in perspective. We are moving forward. Every single day we are making progress. The Iraqi people and their military forces are reaching out and taking responsibility in their own country and the hope we are extending to them for democracy and freedom.

Just over 3 years ago, Saddam Hussein ruled that country. We all know he killed hundreds of thousands of his own people whose only crime was to oppose his tyranny. Our military performed flawlessly in their march to Baghdad and overthrew Saddam Hussein. Then, in January 2005, the Iraqis held elections for a transitional national assembly to begin the drafting of the Iraqi Constitution. They overwhelmingly approved that Constitution in October of 2005. And then in December of 2005, they held elections for a permanent national assembly.

The Iraqi Parliament then approved the Cabinet, including the most controversial post of Defense and Interior Ministers. I remind my colleagues that the Iraqi voter turnout during last year's elections for their national assembly and referendum on their Constitution was respectively 58 percent, 77 percent, and 63 percent. It is clear that the Iraqi people are participating in their political process and building their own institutions that will eventually allow them to govern themselves and determine their own future.

On the security side, we have trained more than 260,000 Iraqi security forces and these forces are daily becoming more and more competent. They are now leading daily operations against insurgents and al-Qaida and the sectarian strife in Iraq.

We know there is a price to be paid, and I guess in the end, the difference between those who would retreat prematurely and simply give up and those of us who believe the fight is worth fighting for and the sacrifices that this Nation has made in the cause of freedom are unfortunate but worth it, the differences between those who believe war is bad and must never be fought and those who believe that war is bad but sometimes must be fought for the right reasons.

It is dispiriting that some politicians reading the polls in Iraq want us to set an arbitrary timetable for withdrawal, and this despite they have no plan for success for winning the war or what to do in the vacuum that will be created once we give up.

We know that terrorists remain on the attack and, given our willingness to retreat, will simply take advantage of that vulnerability and attack America and other innocent people again.

In conclusion, I think the policy of retreat and defeatism and simply giving up is not one that serves our Nation well. It does not serve the interests of the Iraqi people, and it would simply be the wrong decision for this Senate to make at this time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I wish to thank our colleague from Texas for his powerful message and also for his work on the Senate Armed Services Committee where he has labored long and hard and well into the future, I hope. I thank the Senator.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SUNUNU). The Senator from California.

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, as has been said, more than 2,500 brave men and women of America's fighting forces have now been killed in Iraq. Another 18,500 have been wounded. The victims of this violence include two American soldiers captured in an ambush at a checkpoint south of Baghdad who were brutally tortured, killed, and left surrounded by roadside bombs. I join with all of my colleagues in offering our deepest sympathies.

Yet with American troops now caught in the middle of raging sectarian violence, it is all too likely that such heinous acts will go on and on. This war, originally projected to last but a few months, has gone on for 39 months with no end in sight.

Our Nation is spending \$2.5 billion a week on the conflict, and the violence has worsened.

Iraqis have suffered greatly. More than 30,000 civilians have been killed, including 4,000 in the past 3 months alone. And another 90,000 Iraqis have had to flee their homes and their country to avoid the bloodshed.

In the past 5 days alone, according to news reports, nearly 100 civilians have been murdered in car bombings, shootings and other attacks, despite a new security crackdown by Iraqi and American forces.

For example, on Friday, 16 people were killed and 28 wounded when a shoe bomber blew himself up inside the Buratha mosque during religious services.

Saturday, one of the bloodiest days yet in recent months, over 40 civilians died in a series of car bombs and mortar attacks around Baghdad.

Day after day and month after month, we see that an open-ended commitment of United States forces neither controls nor abates the insurgency but, rather, it appears to inflame it.

What is becoming very apparent is that the murderous conflicts that bloody Baghdad and other cities daily can only be reduced by Iraqis—Iraqis who are willing and able to come together and stop this brutal and ruthless violence.

So I rise today to say that the time has come for the United States to recognize that United States troops cannot abate this kind of sectarian violence; only Iraqis can.

Late last year, Congress approved and President Bush signed into law an amendment that was in this very Defense authorization bill. That amendment pointed out that:

Calendar year 2006—

That this year—

should be a period of significant transition to full Iraqi sovereignty, with Iraqi security forces taking the lead for the security of a free and sovereign Iraq, thereby creating the conditions for the phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq.

Mr. President, 79 Senators from both sides of the aisle voted for this amendment, and I believe the amendment presented today that we are debating right now is the right way to follow up on this earlier Senate initiative. It is not cut-and-run by any stretch of the imagination.

When President Bush staged his brief visit to Baghdad last week, he told Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that he came to look him "in the eye." Now it is time for the President of the United States to look the American people in the eye.

As a nation, we have had enough repetition of slogans and reassurances that have become increasingly hollow in the continuing blast of roadside bombs and the rattle of automatic gunfire. No longer will "we stand down when they stand up" suffice for policy. No, Mr. President, we want you to recognize this.

Three years ago, the United States may have been misguided into war in Iraq, but now most certainly the country must not be misguided about the realities in Iraq today and the need to change our mission.

What is victory in a land torn by its own warring factions? Is it quite possibly allowing Iraqis to solve Iraqi problems and to remove the shibboleth of an ongoing occupying army making decisions that should be left to Iraqis?

Despite what may have been said these past few days, our amendment is not about cutting and running. Rather,